

INFOCUS

OCTOBER
2020

**WOMEN'S
WORK**

WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE: A SNAPSHOT

AROUND THE WORLD



1/3

of employed women
work in agriculture

WORKFORCE



50%

of women working in agriculture
are in a management role

LOOKING FORWARD



56%

of students enrolled in
agriculture, environmental and
related disciplines are women



80%

of households without piped
water rely on women and
girls for collection



84%

of all off-farm income
is generated by women



23%

increase in the last five years of
non-school agriculture qualifications
were achieved by women

FOREWORD

The role of women in Australian agriculture has historically been under the radar – providing support, advice, labour and alternative income while rarely being recognised as a fundamental part of the Australian agriculture industry's success story.

Today, women make up 34 per cent of employees in the agricultural sector and are estimated to provide one third of all on-farm income and a massive 84 per cent of off-farm income. Despite this, networking and industry groups focused on women remain a relatively new introduction to the industry's landscape. The reality of the value and depth of women's contribution to Australian agricultural production potential goes further than even these figures recognise; women fulfil vital roles as business decision-makers, advisers, bookkeepers, mediators and succession planners. Women also play a crucial role in diversifying farm output towards agri tourism, food and hospitality ventures.

As a result, many women are isolated from the broader industry as 'silent' participants on farm. That trend is slowly changing with more and more women taking part in tertiary education in agriculture and related disciplines, and the workforce shifting to have a higher, formal, paid participation from women.

WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE AROUND THE WORLD

Established by the United Nations, the International Day of Rural Women recognises the critical role and contribution of rural women, including Indigenous women, in enhancing agricultural and rural development, improving food security and eradicating rural poverty. Globally, one in three employed women works in agriculture.

Women farmers may be as productive and enterprising as their male counterparts but are less able to access land, credit, agricultural inputs and markets. According to the UN "If women in rural areas had the same access to agricultural assets, education, and markets as men, agricultural production could be increased, and the number of hungry people reduced by 100-150 million."

The 2020 Theme of International Day of Rural Women of: *Building rural women's resilience in the wake of COVID-19* reflects the disproportionate impact the pandemic has had on women; as victims of domestic violence, as unpaid caregivers in families and communities, and as workers in jobs that lack social protection with this being compounded in rural settings.

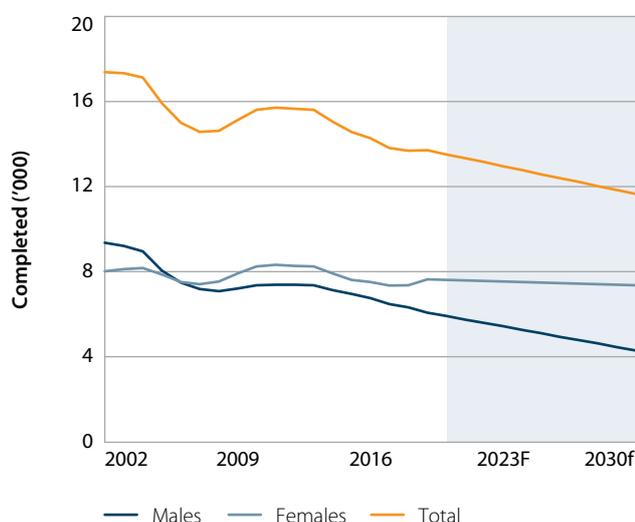
WOMEN, AGRICULTURE AND 2020: COVID-19, DROUGHTS AND BUSHFIRES

2020 has been a difficult year for communities of all types across the globe. For regional Australia, COVID-19 has been one of many challenges faced in the year. 2020 brought the much awaited break in drought conditions across much of Australia's agriculture area and a return of optimism to the sector. But it also brought bushfires which impacted many agricultural areas across the country with many areas still recovering. The role of women in weathering and recovering from such events can never be underestimated, and while it is often men who are portrayed as shouldering the burdens of drought or fire-fighting, that role is increasingly being filled by Australia's women – both on the frontline, and behind the scenes.

The topic of isolation cannot be discussed in the current landscape without also addressing the impacts of COVID-19 on the agriculture industry, workforce participation and rural communities. While COVID-19 restrictions have typically been far less restrictive in rural and regional Australia than in Melbourne or Sydney, the implications for communities, farmers and their families who typically have less day-to-day interactions within their community are significant.

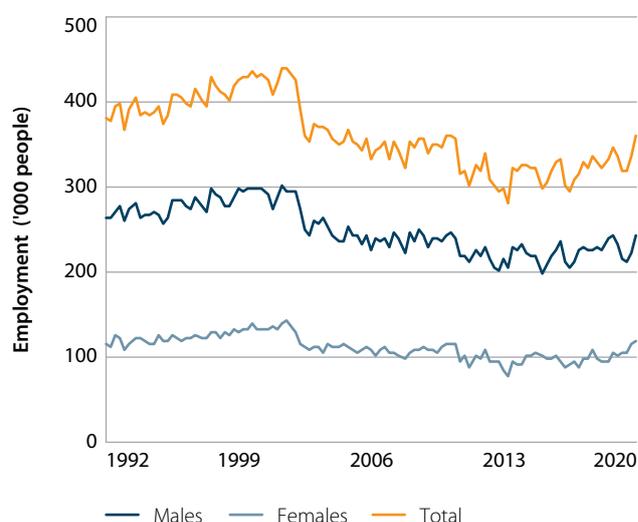
Women are more likely to have taken on home-schooling duties where children, usually at boarding-school are staying home, this has become particularly stressful for those living in border communities where regular cross-border travel was often required for access to the closest service centre.

COURSE COMPLETION BY GENDER: AGRICULTURE AND RELATED FIELDS



Source: uCube, highereducationstatistics.education.gov.au

TOTAL EMPLOYMENT IN AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND FISHERIES BY GENDER



Source: ABS

THE NUMBER OF WOMEN ENROLLED AND COMPLETING TERTIARY STUDIES IN AGRICULTURE AND RELATED DISCIPLINES HAS SHOWN A STRONG AND STEADY INCREASE

The broader implications for the agriculture industry have been far more muted than for the general economy, supporting many rural and regional communities and families through the pandemic. In the face of an economy-wide reduction in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of 7 per cent in the June 2020 quarter, the Australian agriculture, forestry and fisheries sector saw a reduction of only 1.9 per cent, making it one of the most resilient sectors to the impacts of lockdowns, bettered only by sectors such as mining, electricity and financial services. COVID-19 also had an interesting counter effect on employment in regional areas where the closure of borders led to a reduction in availability of seasonal workers. As a result, the number of people employed in agriculture increased 10 per cent in the May 2020 quarter, while economy-wide, the number of jobs fell 6 per cent. Of that, while the increases in employment predominantly employed more males, there was also a 6 per cent increase in females employed full-time.

Certain commodities that are heavily trade-exposed and reliant on global growth, e.g. wool, are likely to continue to struggle during the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent global downturn. Most major commodities, however, are continuing to hold up well, with some sectors such as the cattle industry performing very strongly. As a result, regional communities and agribusinesses have performed relatively well throughout the pandemic, lessening the impact of lockdown restrictions and isolation on those same communities.

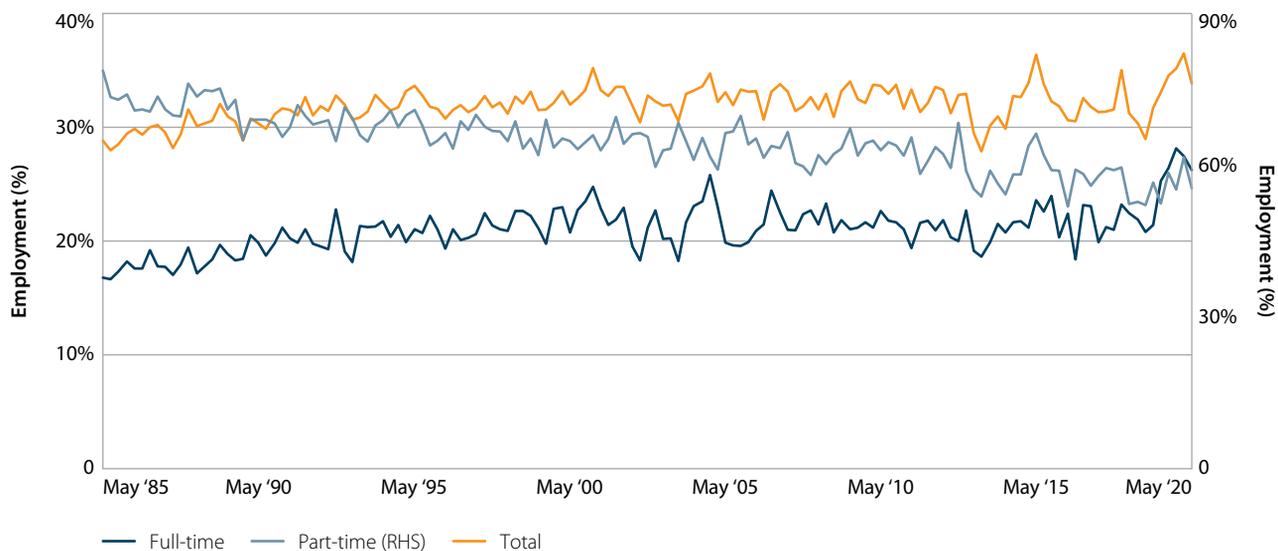
WOMEN IN THE AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE

Formal Role

The formal, paid employment of women in the Australian agricultural workforce has shown a strong and steady increase for many years from around 26 per cent in 1984 to 34 per cent in 2020. Behind this, however, lies a significant split between the number of women in full-time and part-time employment. In 2020, women were 56 per cent of the part-time workforce in agriculture but only 26 per cent of the full-time workforce. This trend too, though, is changing. In 1984 women were 73 per cent of the part-time workforce, but only 15 per cent of the full-time employed. Similarly, the underemployment rate of females continues to fall and now sits at 8.5 per cent of employed females, compared with 6.9 per cent for males.

Women made up 28 per cent of all managers in the agriculture industry, with the latest Agricultural Census in 2016 revealing that over 50 per cent of women working in agriculture, were working in a 'managers' position. However there is also distinct lack of women's representation in large corporations and industry bodies, with males making up almost 90 per cent of rural representative bodies and females making up only 2.3 per cent of CEOs in Australian agribusinesses, compared with an average of 17 per cent across other industries.

EMPLOYMENT OF FEMALES BY JOB TYPE



Source: ABS

Recently, online campaigns such as 'Buy from the Bush' and 'Spend with Us' have seen women, particularly in drought-stricken or bush-fire impacted areas, able to connect with communities around Australia with potential to supplement their farm incomes selling items direct to city customers. In its first three months the Buy from the Bush campaign, representing 97 per cent female owned businesses, provided featured businesses with sales increases of average of 300 per cent.

Informal Role

While the role of women is increasing in formal employment, it is the informal and unrecognised role of women on farms and within the industry which leaves many feeling isolated from their peers and from the support structures in the broader industry. The informal role of women takes many different guises ranging from formal paid employment off-farm which contributes to the running costs of many farming enterprises (ABARES estimates that women provide 84 per cent of all off-farm income) to the contribution made to account management, record keeping and overarching business advice.

Indeed, while men traditionally fill the role of farm manager, it is commonly asserted that women fill the role of final decision-maker when it comes to the bigger decisions for the farming business. Women can also typically fill the role of family mediator and succession planner for many businesses considering the transition to a next generation. The 2016 census also revealed that 37 per cent of women working in agriculture that they are involved in volunteer activities compared to the national figure for all adults involved in volunteering activities of 21 per cent.

Perhaps the most pervasive problem for women filling those informal roles is that they are not recorded or recognised. Official figures are limited to estimating the amount of domestic work undertaken by women in agriculture as a proxy for the 'silent' role of women. While those figures from the 2016 agricultural census show that 13 per cent more women in agriculture undertook unpaid domestic duties than the national figure, those figures do not begin to capture the true role of women in the industry.

REDUCING ISOLATION THROUGH EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

While significant advances have been made in increasing women's formal involvement in the agriculture sector, the increase in the percentage of women employed in the sector has stalled in recent years at around one third of total employment. There is, however, a trend which is likely to see a new generation of women involved in the sector.

While the age of the agricultural workforce continues to increase and many farmers, managers and labourers approach retirement age, many in the industry are asking where the next generation of producers will come from? Despite a longer-term decline in the number of people employed in the agricultural workforce the trend since the early 2010s has seen some rebuilding in the number of jobs in the sector. At the same time, the number of women enrolled and completing tertiary studies in agriculture and related disciplines has shown a strong and steady increase. In 2011, there were 22,310 women who had completed a non-school qualification in agriculture. This had increased to 27,384 by 2016, which is an increase of 23 per cent over five years. This compares with an increase of 8 per cent for men holding non-school qualifications in agriculture over the same period.

Currently, over 56 per cent of the students enrolled in agriculture, environmental and related disciplines are women – and this rate has been increasing steadily for many years.

On current trends, this would see an additional 18,445 females with tertiary qualifications enter the workforce. This compares with an expected 13,646 male graduates.

What does this mean for the future of the Australian agricultural workforce? With the average age of the Australian farmer hitting 61 years in 2019, and the median age of the entire agricultural workforce at 49 years of age, there are likely to be a growing number of vacancies in the sector. On current trends, there are likely to be at least another 48,000 jobs in the Australian agriculture sector – of those, 27,000 are likely to be women and 14,000 of those in management positions.

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